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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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SUBJECT: "THREE PAIRS -- AND THEIR CARE." Information from leather chemists of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Free publication: "Leather Shoes." Farmers' Bulletin No. 1523.

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p.1 February twenty-second, 1943.....Washington's birthday....and the topic of conversation in many homes in this country Washington fathered still is shoes. The historians don't seem to have recorded how many new pairs of shoes Washington averaged each year.....or even how many shoes, new and old, he kept in his closet at Mount Vernon. But they do report on the kind of shoes Washington wore.

Washington seems to have had just about two kinds of shoes, both sensible and suited to their use. Around the house...for meals...at family prayers... or on state occasions indoors Washington wore heavy low pumps with a large oblong silver buckle and a high leather tongue. Many of Stuart's famous paintings of Washington show him wearing these pumps. But for outdoor wear...around his farm... or riding horseback....or as a young man out surveying he wore heavy black boots. As a surveyor he wore boots and high buttoned leggings or gaiters. For horseback riding he had spurs strapped on to his boots.

All the shoes Washington wore, of course, were handmade and always in good repair. You can be sure that a careful prudent man like Washington saw to it that his servants gave his shoes the best of care. Washington must never have forgotten his days at Valley Forge when his soldiers were without shoes and were on duty in bandaged and bleeding feet.

Well, shoes are precious again today. Our armed forces need shoes. And

civilians must make their shoes go farther by giving them the best of care.

Here are suggestions from leather experts of the U.S. Department of Agriculture to help you keep your shoes in good condition -- to keep them comfortable, serviceable and good looking as well.

First tip: Have at least 2 pairs of shoes for everyday wear. Shoes last longer if you give them at least every other day off duty. Perspiration is hard on leather. Give shoes a day to dry, air and rest after a day on foot. Keep your shoes in shape on their day off by shoe trees or pads of crumpled paper inside. The best "trees" for shoes are those made in the shape of your foot. The trees that are simply wooden ends on a strip of metal that bends in the center help shoes keep straight, provided the trees aren't so long or strong that they stretch shoes out of shape.

Second tip on caring for shoes; Mend them promptly when they begin to wear or tear. Don't wait until they are so badly worn that the shoe man can't do a good job of mending. The minute a seam begins to rip, the minute a hole wears through the outsole..the minute a heel twists out of shape or runs down...that is the minute to take shoes for mending. If you let a torn or worn place go too long, it may be impossible to mend nicely. Shoes often are worth several resoling jobs. But the new sole must go on before the old one has worn through to the welt. The time to resole is when the hole has only gone through the outsole.

A rundown heel not only looks bad. It can pull the whole shoe out of shape.... and twist feet, ankles and legs out of shape also. Take your shoes in for "squaring up" the heels as soon as you notice that the heels are running down.

Wherever the stitching gives way on the upper parts of the shoes, you can mend it at home with some stout flax shoe thread and a good strong needle. Follow the holes made by the original stitching. Many families do their own resoling, too. Some mail order houses sell kits for repairing shoes. You can also buy these kits .

hardware and shoe supply stores.

The third point about caring for shoes is to keep them clean and lubricated. Mud, water and too much drying makes leather hard and stiff, causes it to crack and wear out. Oiling or waxing save leather by keeping out moisture and perspiration -- by keeping the leather soft and pliant. Lubricate outdoor shoes and garden shoes with oil. Street shoes and best shoes keep in good condition if you polish them. Most shoe polishes are mixtures of wax, colored with dye and softened to a paste with turpentine. Others are wax with borax or soda, colored with dye or powdered bone charcoal and soap to form a paste. The leather experts say the idea that turpentine in a polish harms shoe leather is wrong. However, any polish or shoe preparation that contains free acid or alkali can injure leather. Some preparations for white summer shoes containing a bleaching acid have been known to injure leather.

When shoes get muddy, clean the mud off as soon as possible....wash the leather with soap and water, if necessary.... and then rub oil on the shoe while the leather is still wet. The only oil you can use on leather if you are going to polish the shoes is castor oil. So if your best shoes or street shoes get wet, lubricate them with castor oil, and then dry them and polish. Dry leather in a cool place...never near a fire or hot radiator. And wait until shoes are thoroughly dry to wear them. For wet leather is weak...pulls out of shape and tears easily.

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